

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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"A LEAL LASS."

By RICHARD ASHE KING.

CHAPTER XIII. MAY HAS A HOLIDAY.

MEANWHILE, that "propinquity," which, according to Johnson, is enough of itself to generate love, was working with full and fell effect upon the susceptible heart of Gower. He was deliciously in love and lived only in thoughts of May in her absence, and in her smiles when with her. Of Mrs. Beresford's encouragement he had no doubt; and he had little doubt of the good Vicar's; but of May's he had deepening doubts. Her frank, collected, and playful manner was not now, even in Gower's eyes, the manner of a maiden in love. Certainly she liked him, but did she love him? He dared not yet ask May. If only he knew how he stood with her!

If only he did! If only he heard May's conversations about him with her father!

"Father, I wish you'd take him to-day; it's your week for the funerals," May urged aggrievedly, in allusion to the arrangement by which her father and Mr. Spratt took "the surplice duty" week about.

The Vicar laughed.

"Do you find him so depressing?" he asked.

"We haven't an idea in common," she groaned in unaffected weariness.

"You mean that he hasn't half a one in his head to contribute? Well, he isn't a genius, certainly; but he seems good-natured enough."

"Yes, he's good-natured, and good-tempered, and amiable—like Mr. Spratt."

"My dear May!" exclaimed her father, "what has he done?"

But he soon perceived that May had a serious reason for the request, and was at no loss either to guess what it was. Mrs. Beresford, indeed, in the exuberance of her triumph at the success of her match-making plans, had hinted to him pretty plainly that a proposal was imminent—a suggestion which the Vicar pooh-poohed as preposterous. But May's serious anxiety to be rid of the youth convinced the Vicar that there was something in this suggestion of his wife.

"It's easy to say 'take him,' but he won't follow me," he said. "It is like Fred to get even his hospitality done for him," he added with clouded brow, as having graver reasons than this for his irritation against Fred.

"He could hardly have helped asking him, and he couldn't know that he would have to be away himself," May replied with her usual eagerness to take up arms for Fred.

"Well, dear, I hope Mr. Gower is the only trouble he's brought upon us," her father answered with a smile and a sigh—the smile being assumed and the sigh sincere. "What have you done with him?"

"I sent him into the village, but he'll be back presently."

"I had better go and meet him."

"It's no good meeting misfortunes halfway," May answered smiling; "but you might carry him off when he comes back. I really must go to the schools to-day."

"I shall bore him to death."

"Oh, well, he'll have his revenge," she rejoined with a touch almost of acrimony in her tone.

In truth May had been joked so about Mr. Gower in the village, and indirectly instructed about him by her mother, that she had her eyes well opened to the mean-

ing of the young gentleman's later manner, which, indeed, was marked enough. Now while he was to her only Fred's friend, she could endure the dreary day-long drizzle of his dulness; but in this new light of a lover his complacent silliness was intolerable. Besides, she had come, not without good reason, to think a proposal possible, and this she must ward off in all ways.

But, unfortunately, her sudden distance of manner, and her new avoidance of Gower were in some moods interpreted by him in an opposite sense—as either the shyness or the coquetry of conscious love. To-day, for instance, being in better spirits, he was disposed so to interpret them; and while May was arranging with her father for his being taken off her hands, he was rehearsing to himself a proposal he had at last resolved upon. Hurrying back to find an immediate opportunity for making it, he was met in the hall by the Vicar, who carried him off helplessly to Leeds. But again, this move of the Vicar's had the opposite of its intended effect. Gower, bent and drawn back like a bow, waited now only the moment of his release to let loose his pent-up passion, and came to prize his opportunities in proportion to their growing scarceness.

Meanwhile, he was carried off a victim by the victimised Vicar; for it was hard to say which of the two was the more uncomfortable in the companionship of the other. The Vicar's discomfort, however, was purely unselfish and hospitable, arising from a consciousness of boredom of his guest by himself, not of himself by his guest.

"You ought to do Leeds for the same reason that Tom Sheridan did a coal-pit—to be able to say he had done it. And, indeed, when you've done Leeds, you might say you had done a coal-pit, without much strain on your conscience."

"Is it so black, sir?" asked the hapless youth, in the hope of some excuse for escape.

"Nearly; it is just 'darkness visible.' It's down in such a hole that the smoke can't get away."

"Have you to go there to-day, sir?"

"Not particularly; but you ought to see it, as you haven't seen a coal-pit."

"But I couldn't think of taking you there; and, besides, I would rather——"

"I assure you it's not the least trouble," the Vicar hastened to say, "and I should like to show you the fine old parish church, and a factory or two."

"But I've done one," gasped Gower, with a dread recollection of Sugden's.

"Not an iron factory, not a forge. You really must see Jeffrey's great iron and engine works. You couldn't leave the North without seeing them; it would be like leaving Rome without seeing St. Peter's."

Leaving Doncaster on the eve of the St. Leger would have been a much more effective illustration to Gower's ears; but even the St. Leger would not have drawn him to-day, voluntarily, from May's side; and yet he has to go down into this Stygian hole!

The hapless Vicar tried in turn, and in vain, every subject, and had, at last, to give up the attempt at conversation in despair. The only thing wherein Gower showed the least interest during the day, was his own weight, which, according to the scales in Jeffrey's foundry, was less by nearly a pound than what it had been a month since in Cambridge.

This seemed greatly to exercise him, and he recurred to it more than once during the Vicar's irrelevant expositions of the might of Nasmyth hammers, or of the beauty of old stained glass. Indeed, this loss of weight was the sole impression he brought back with him from Leeds.

Altogether, so May said, Mr. Gower had his revenge; for the boredom he inflicted was as much deeper than that he endured, as the Vicar's hospitable eagerness to please was greater than his guest's complaisance. There was just one lucid interval in the day—dinner-time—during which Gower, being sumptuously entertained at the "Victoria," recovered his amiability and spirits.

He went so far even as to admit, over his port, that "he supposed there must be such places as Leeds."

"Yes," replied the Vicar, laughing. "If we hadn't such places we couldn't grow merchant-princes, or even lilies of the field, like yourself."

"I don't think any of my people were ever in trade," Gower answered, with an eye to impressing his prospective father-in-law with the grandeur of his house.

"You sell sheep and cows, I suppose, and, perhaps, pheasants and partridges, eh? And you wouldn't make much by them if there were no such swarming hives as Leeds."

From this conversation the sagacious Gower inferred that the Vicar was levelling him down to his daughter in prospect of the

approaching proposal! Cunning folk, like owls, accustomed to look always for vermin in darkness, are wide and wild in their aim in broad, downright daylight; and Gower was just the man to misunderstand the motives of so transparent a person as our Vicar.

"It doesn't matter so long as a man's a gentleman," he said, as though making a concession to the Vicar, who, by the way, was of a much older and higher family than himself.

"It depends on what you mean by a gentleman," replied the Vicar, conscious of a suspicion of patronage in the youth's tone, "whether you mean a gentleman by birth or by position, or in manners, or in mind. The last is the gold; and the rest only 'the guinea's stamp,' or worthless paper money."

"I meant all of them together."

"You don't often find them all together," rejoined the Vicar, "or often find the last of them at all; but when you do find it, the rest doesn't matter much, as you say."

Though Gower had by no means said this or meant it, he accepted the credit of it complacently.

"But here, in the West Riding," continued the Vicar, "'a gentleman' has another meaning altogether, and is defined as you would define a tramp, as 'a man who has nothing to do.' What a satire on the gentry!"

"Not many of that sort in these parts, I fancy," Gower replied with a shuddering recollection of toil as ceaseless, grimy, and monotonous as that of their Sisyphæan steam engines!

"No; they don't believe here in Aristotle's 'the end of labour is to give leisure,' but consider work, merely as work, virtuous in itself."

But the mere mention of Aristotle was enough to silence Gower, who relapsed forthwith into his former gloom. He took interest henceforth in nothing till they regained Hammersley station, where he had himself reweighed on the company's spring balance, which registered him nearly a pound heavier than he had been a month since in Cambridge! The Vicar suggested that the Leeds smoke which, on the principle of the Montgolfier balloon, would naturally levitate him, accounted for the two pounds' discrepancy; but to Gower, the matter seemed much too serious for a jest. He had got some theory into his head about the proper proportion of

weight to height, which he expounded with much earnestness to the Vicar.

Altogether the victimised Vicar felt as weary of his day as though he had been playing lawn-tennis for eight hours with a man who never returned him a single ball. There was no subject which he had not started and which had not fallen forthwith dead to the ground. He was, of course, conscious that men of his age were not in touch with lads of the age of Gower; but in his long and varied experience of such youths, he had never before met one with whom he could not hit upon a single subject of mutual interest. Yet to such a youth his wife would have been rejoiced to bind her daughter for life! Thinking much of the extraordinary sophistication of women's minds in such matters, he congratulated himself that May at least had not learned to value a man by his mere tinsel wrappings.

As he entered the Vicarage drawing-room he asked the question that Gower's eyes had asked already:

"Where's May?"

"She's gone to the choir rehearsal. She would go," answered Mrs. Beresford querulously.

"Enoch asked her, probably, as Spratt has given them up in disgust," the Vicar suggested.

"He'd better give up his curacy if he gives up his work," retorted Mrs. Beresford.

"He's only bound to listen to them on Sundays and festivals; and quite enough, too."

"You know very well, George, it's not that—but some nonsense about women being out of place in a choir."

"In the sanctuary," my dear, "in the sanctuary." I suppose he thinks, like Saint Kevin, there ought to be sanctuary somewhere from you."

"She thought she would have been back before you returned," Mrs. Beresford said.

"She's later to-night than usual, though she knows I don't like her coming back alone at this hour," she added, with a glance at Gower.

"If you would allow me to go for her, I should be only too happy to escort her," Gower cried eagerly.

Mrs. Beresford of course assented, while the Vicar dared not dissent.

CHAPTER XIV. THE REHEARSAL.

MAY'S main motive in attending the choir rehearsal was escape from Gower; but

she had also in her mind the motive suggested by her father—the conciliation of Enoch Lumb, the choir master, one of her dearest, worthiest, and kindest village friends.

Mr. Spratt's Popish proposal to exclude women from the choir shook Enoch's faith to its foundations; for, to his thinking, as the essential difference between the Church of England and Dissent was the Anglican choral service, so the essential difference between the Churches of England and of Rome was the admission of women into the choir. In truth, Enoch, like many West Riding folk, was music mad, and considered all the machinery of the Church of England as little more than the mere bellows to the organ of her choral service. Her choral service, again, meant to him mainly the singing of his favourite pupil, Phoebe Ann, a girl of only thirteen, with a very sweet, true, and pure voice—what there was of it. Of course, at her age, there was so little of it that her singing seemed sometimes like the music of the spheres, exquisite, but inaudible, to everyone except Enoch, who sincerely believed it to be the soul of the choir.

If, then, her choral service was the soul of the Church of England, and if the soul of Hammersley choral service was the voice of Phoebe Ann, what a heretic did Mr. Spratt appear to Enoch, when he proposed the exclusion of Phoebe Ann from the choir! The old man did well to be angry.

"Spratt cannot bide to think folk coom for owt nobbut to hearken him praich," he said, in indignant explanation of this attempt to eliminate Phoebe Ann from the attractions of the church. "He'd have it all to hissen if he could; an' so he wad, aw reckon, if there wor nobbut his praiching to hearken to."

Perhaps, the oddest thing about Enoch's delusion was that the first and last thing he valued in a voice was power; and no one was more critical and caustic than he, about the lack of this essential vocal quality in anyone except his favourite pupil. When Reuben Rairatow, who had really a delicious tenor voice, sang "Comfort ye" at "the Anniversary," everyone but Enoch was in raptures.

"Nay," he said, when asked confidently "what did yo' think by that voice, Enoch?" "Nay, aw ne'er heered it; aw sat at far end o' t' church, tha knaws."

Yet, when Phoebe Ann was piping some solo (all possible solos were given to her),

in her little linnet-like voice, Enoch would hurry down to sit at the far end of the church all ear, as if he—

Took in strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of death.

Whereas he really needed to be all ear to catch her voice at all.

Yet, though he gave Phoebe Ann all possible solos, and would have made the very "amens" solos for her, if he could; still such was his tact and cleverness that he managed to get, and keep together, a respectable choir—a remarkable achievement when the professional jealousy of singers is considered, together with Enoch's favouritism and caustic criticism.

Enoch's admiration of May amounted to worship almost, and was, indeed, so deep that he would admit her voice to be finer than Phoebe Ann's. He would hardly have made even this admission—though May's voice was as strong as it was sweet—if she had been in the choir; but, as she was outside all competitions for solos, Enoch conceded to her the palm. He would even at rehearsals pose her as Phoebe Ann's model, by setting May to sing the solo first, much to her confusion and discomfort.

On entering the schoolroom this evening—for Mr. Spratt had relegated rehearsals to the schoolroom to save the church the desecration of Enoch's dry humour and the laughter it occasioned—May found Phoebe Ann standing forward waiting for the cue of the harmonium symphony to begin her solo.

"Soft, lass, soft!" Enoch cried earnestly, as a premonitory caution, as though Phoebe Ann were given to shaking the roof with her reedy trill. "Soft, lass, soft!"

But when Phoebe Ann, seeing May enter, remained silent altogether, Enoch said, in his dry way:

"Nay, that's soft eneu anyway, lass."

"Miss Beresford," Phoebe Ann answered in explanation; whereupon Enoch turned to see and welcome May.

"Nay, Miss May!" he cried with heart-felt pleasure. "Aw'm fain to see thee, aw ham that. Mr. Spratt has g'ven us t'sack thro' church o' practice neets, an' reckons to sack us thro' sarvices an' all. He braids o' a cock that can ne'er bide to hear another crow i' t'same yard—"

"It is not that, Enoch; but he likes a surpliced choir."

Enoch smiled at May's innocence. As, however, he could not in Phoebe Ann's

* "Braids o'," i.e. is like.

presence enlighten May as to Mr. Spratt's real motive, he said only:

"Nay, a surplised choir! Who's to tue* wi' t'boys? A boy's voice braids o' a bird's egg; it's no sooiner hatched nor it's cracked. Aw'm noan bother w boys, while aw can get lasses wi' voices that hold aht as long as you need 'em."

"But Mr. Spratt has given up all thoughts of a surplised choir, Enoch."

"Ay, as aw've gi'en up all thowt o' Parleement," rejoined Enoch. "We could do wi' a surplice less, aw reckon, i't' church, i' place of a score moer on 'em," he added, with some bitterness, for Mr. Spratt had become altogether abominable to him.

May was a good deal shocked by the example of dislike and contempt of Mr. Spratt which Enoch was setting the choir; as, however, the old man was a chartered libertine in his tongue, and intended, and was taken to, mean much less than he said, she merely hastened to turn the conversation.

"I'm afraid I interrupted Phoebe Ann," she said.

"Nay, yo've just coomed i' time to gi'e her a lesson—gi'e Miss May t' music, lass," he turned to say to Phoebe Ann.

It was vain for May to protest, as Enoch was bent upon paying her this extravagant compliment in the presence of the choir; so she took the music, while Enoch hurried to the other end of the room to hear her to the greatest advantage. Here he listened with ears, eyes, and mouth (for he enjoyed singing, and especially her singing, intensely), while he kept time unconsciously with head, hands, and feet. But just in the very middle of the solo, he shouted, "Stop!" May stopped dead, thinking she had made some terrible blunder.

"Aw beg your pardon, Miss May; but you're makkin' sich an a din that aw can noane hear what Frances Ann Greenough is saying."

The hapless Frances Ann, who had been seen by Enoch to whisper something to her neighbour, was overwhelmed by so sarcastic a rebuke.

"What is it, lass? Spak' up!" After a silence that might be felt of a second or two, Enoch added coolly: "Yo' mun forgi'e me, Miss May, but aw thowt it wor sommat that wadn't wait whiles tha'd finished. Tak' it thro'—He leadeest me,

agin, Fred," he said to the youth who was playing the harmonium; and from this passage May meekly recommenced, feeling not in the least offended, but exceedingly sorry for the crushed Frances Ann.

When the solo ceased, and the chorus came in, Enoch beat time with a big Prayer-Book upon a school-desk; and at the close he said, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow:

"We mun tak' that o'er agin wi' a bit moer sperrit, and wakken Silas theer, who's snorin' i' place o' singin'. When aw wor thee age, lad, aw pumped t'Hallelujahs while t' sweet fair pahred dahn me, aw did. Singin' wor singin' then, yo' mind, an' noan t' smoo'ered grunt an' squeak of a pig i' a poke—or i' a surplice, either," he added, as another cut at Mr. Spratt's heresy. "Nah, lass, it's thee benefit," he said, turning to Phoebe Ann, who, being a shy girl, and modest withal—in spite of Enoch's extravagant opinion of her—sang with tremulous nervousness through her consciousness of eclipse by May. Nevertheless, Enoch hung upon her lips with a rapt attention which only a very cynical musician would have had the heart to smile at. "Nay, lass, yo mun let it goa, an' noan keep it shut up an' flutterin' like a bird i' a basket," he said in allusion to Phoebe Ann's timid "tremolo." "Shoo's flayed on* thee, miss," he whispered aside to May.

But Phoebe Ann was "flayed on" more than May at that moment, for the sudden flutter and failure of her voice were due to the appearance of Gower. As only May and Enoch had their backs to him, he stood at the door shamefaced, in full view of Phoebe Ann and the choir, conscious of the inevitable construction they would put upon this dog-like attendance on May.

Indeed, he had the precise blinking, half-averted, mortified look of a dog which its child owner has just decorated with a ribbon, as a symbol of ownership. There is nothing more difficult than for a shy man to wear the yoke of love, when first imposed, without showing a self-conscious and sheepish desire to hide himself from the ridicule of his fellows. But with the whole choir grinning in unison, so shy a youth as Gower felt and looked absurdly self-conscious and sheepish.

May, turning to follow the broad track of this grin, was mortified beyond measure

* "Tue," i.e. bother with.

* "Flayed on," i.e. afraid of.

at sight of Gower. She had been rallied for days past about Gower by the whole parish in a manner as light and graceful as the tread of a hippopotamus upon a sensitive plant, and here was an advertisement to the whole parish of what it had rallied her upon!

She reddened to the roots of her hair with shame and vexation, and marched down to the door with as much stateliness and deliberation as she could assume, while conscious of every eye and ear behind her being strained to take in the interview.

"What is it, Mr. Gower? Has Fred come?"

"No; but Mrs. Beresford wished me to escort you home," Gower stammered, for May's manner was by no means encouraging, while the audience of the chorus was embarrassing in the extreme.

"Escort me? But I do not need an escort, I assure you; besides, I am not going home for some time yet, as the rehearsal is not nearly over," May said weakly, for it is always feeble and ineffective to assign two reasons—the second being a virtual admission either of the insincerity or of the inadequacy of the first.

"But I should like very much to hear the rehearsal if you'll allow me to stay," he pleaded almost beseechingly.

"I wish you would if you don't mind," May rejoined with unlooked-for alacrity.

"Mind! I should like it greatly, if I'm not in the way," he rejoined eagerly.

"Oh, I'm sure Mr. Lumb won't mind. Mr. Gower has come down to hear the rehearsal, Enoch, if you will let him."

"He's lat' aw reckon, unless tha't tak' solo ovver agin," replied Enoch dryly.

May smiled and shook her head.

"I have to go and see a sick child—Mrs. Lightowler's, you know. Good-night," she said to the choir, and, under cover of their chorussed reply "Good-night, miss," she said to Gower, "Your staying to hear them will gratify them greatly."

Before he could reply she was gone.

Gower felt not only ill-used, but angry, and yet more in love with May than ever! However, it was not possible for him to follow her, or even to escape to the Vicarage, after what had been said; so he stayed with sullen resignation.

He might have made off after a decent interval if it had not unfortunately occurred to Enoch that he really and merely had come, after all, to hear Phoebe Ann sing; wherefore, he put the girl, not only

through the anthem, but through two "services," glancing triumphantly from her to Gower during the performances, and, at the close of each, expatiating enthusiastically upon the beauty of her voice and the finish of her singing.

It was only from these assurances that Gower gathered that the girl had a voice at all, and he gathered it but dimly owing to his ignorance of the language.

"What dost ta think by her, Mr. Gower? Shoo braids a bit o' Patti, eh?"

Gower, not having the faintest notion of what was said, muttered some safe assent.

Enoch was sufficiently encouraged to enter into a long explanation of the difficulties and disadvantages which would prevent Phoebe Ann developing into a Patti, with the result of conveying to the bewildered Gower the idea that he was begging! He would have offered him half-a-crown, or, perhaps, a shilling, if he had been the kind of man to fling away half-crowns or shillings for nothing; but he was not at all. Instead, he offered Enoch his sympathy at an inopportune moment. For, when the old choir-master, in half apology for thinking and speaking so much of Phoebe Ann, explained that "Shoo wor iverything till him," Gower promptly replied that he "was very sorry for him."

Without another word, Gower turned away and quitted the school-room, fearing further importunity, and in no slight disgust with Enoch's imagined mendicancy! On his part, Enoch looked after him perplexedly.

"He's noan all theer, isn't t' lad," he said at last.

"He haulds his head high eneu," observed Silas.

"He's nowt mich to carry in it, tha knaws," rejoined Enoch in explanation.

"Awm fair capped* wi' her keepin' company wi' sich an a gaumless chap," cried Sally Seed, who shed scandal like thistle-down all over the parish.

"Who's keepin' company wi' him?" asked Enoch innocently.

"Miss May, for sewer."

"Miss May? Nay, nivver! Who telled thee, lass?"

"It's all over t' place."

"For sewer it's all ovver t'place sin' tha heeard on it; but who telled it thee, lass?"

Then Sally, perceiving the drift of

* "Capped," i.e. surprised.

Enoch's Socratic examination, remained sulkily silent.

"Yo' noan heeard it thro' him, or thro' Miss May, aw reckon? Nay, lass, ye mun gie up cacklin' ovver addled eggs. Folk ne'er heeda a crowin' hen, tha knaws."

"Phoebe Ann says it," cried Sally, spitefully.

"Aw nobbut said he wor keen on her," replied the precocious Phoebe Ann.

"Folk mud say tha wor keen on a chap, Sally, abaht * believin' owt but spurrins † that any chap could be keen on thee."

This sally of Enoch's was the kind of joke of all others to be appreciated by his audience—a point-blank personality, as knock-down as a blow in the face—for the unfortunate Sally was distressingly plain. Nevertheless Enoch, who was a kind-hearted old man—for all his biting speeches—meant only a mild rebuke, in May's defence, of the scandal-loving Sally. Seeing her much mortified by the long and loud laughter of the choir, he administered what, to his thinking, was a supreme consolation—a solo.

"Yo' mun leave sich-like tales to t' Miss Hicks, lass, an' all t'other ow'd maids i' t' place; for yo' noan belong to that sowrt, or are like to belong 'em aither. Aw ne'er knew an ow'd maid wi' a sweeter voice nor a peacock screamin' agin t' rain, aw didn't. Gi'e 'em 'T' owl i' t' desert,' lass, an' they'll noan laugh at thee as an ow'd maid. Has't got 'T' owl i' t' desert' theer, Fred?"

So Sally was appeased, for she dearly loved to hear her own voice speaking or singing.

But the effect of Enoch's lecture was more than done away with by Sally's overtaking May and Mr. Gower on her way home from the rehearsal. All the Enochs in the world could not then have persuaded her that their leaving the school-room separately, was anything but a lover's ruse.

THIRTY YEARS AGO.

AND why thirty years ago? Why not twenty years—or, for that matter, fifty years—may be asked. Why, simply because the latter epoch would be too remote, and the former too near for our purpose—which is to jog the memory of those who, whether boys or men at the time, had a

share in the life of that era, and rubbed shoulders with the men of giant stature—for giants they seem to us as they loom from the distant past—who were then in their prime. It may be that the warmth and glow of youth lent its colour to that distant time, and that to-day appears in comparison but dull, flat, and unprofitable, because the eyes of the beholder are no longer fresh and undimmed. But allowing for all this, it must still be contended that a certain zest has escaped from life which it once possessed, and that the strong men, who made others strong, as was said of King Arthur—the man who made men—have vanished, or are fast vanishing away, with none to take their place.

Now thirty years ago, when the Suez Canal was undug, the Underground Railway unexcavated, and the German Empire unachieved, we had great men certainly, and we knew it. Dickens was with us in the fulness of his power—"Little Dorrit" had been running month by month in the well-known green covers; everywhere read, criticised, discussed, appreciated in all kinds of society. Sometimes the nucleus of social gatherings assembled about some skilful reader—for the art of reading aloud was then widely cultivated—eagerly sought for, fought for almost at booksellers' shops, at book clubs, and local libraries. Thackeray, too, was in the height of his popularity. His were the monthly yellow covers. Colonel Newcome was still flourishing his stick, and smoking his cheroot down Pall Mall; and "The Virginians" brought some of the charm of his earlier "Esmond" to the grateful palates of his admirers. Macaulay was still writing his history, and his grand style, lucid yet ornate, his picturesque judgements and glowing descriptions, were received with eager interest; and not to have read the last-published volume of Macaulay was something like a confession of imbecility.

And of those whose memories recall the fifties, who can forget the storm that was raised by "Jane Eyre," to us a book ever fresh and young, inspired by the ardour and passion of the best kind of feminine nature, but to the elders and rulers of those days a book altogether wild and improper. "Jane Eyre" would be kept under lock and key, and young women might be sent supperless to bed, for reading the tabooed volumes. Certainly the elders of those days sat upon us with a force and conviction that is not shared

* "Abaht," i.e. without.

† "Spurrins," i.e. banns of marriage.

by their degenerate successors, who assume the mantle but reluctantly which their forbears wore with such an impressive dignity.

Thirty years ago, too, Carlyle was groaning under the weight of his herculean task anent Frederick the Great—the labour of a Titan, if you come to think of it, so to vivify that dead mass of undigested history. And as a kind of literary anti-thesis there was Leigh Hunt still alive, and discoursing pleasantly about men and books. And Douglas Jerrold died just thirty years ago—where shall we now find a tongue so ready, a wit so keen? Are there any men living now whose good things fly round the town, and are carried off to the country, becoming somehow the sign and seal of one connected with the literary persuasion? And if in Jerrold we also recall the expert dramatist, we shall at once bethink us of “Black-eyed Susan,” and that will bring up some talk of T. P. Cooke, who, still not altogether a superfluous veteran, held the stage—’tis thirty years ago—in William beloved of Susan, and in Long Tom Coffin.

And, while in the way of things theatrical, we may ask, had we not Robson, the greatest of low comedians, as those esteemed him who knew him in his prime, and with him the laughter-compelling Wright, the inimitable Buckstone, the genial Paul Bedford? The dignified mantle of great Macready had not long been laid aside, and Charles Kean was in the midst of his brilliant Shakespearian revivals.

In music and the sister arts, perhaps, we shall not have so much to say for the good old times of thirty years ago. But it will take a good deal of what the present day can boast in the way of more extended musical culture and learning to make up for what we have lost—for the splendour and charm of the Italian Opera. And where are the great singers of old, confessedly and deservedly supreme—Mario, Grisi, Herr Formes, and our great English tenor, Sims Reeves, then at his best, with Jenny Lind (that sweetest of singers), the charming Tietjens, and other voices—of thirty years ago—that still the ear of memory can faintly recall?

And then the newspapers and the editors! With what energy the big drum was belaboured among them; with what a voice spoke the Thunderer, and how loomed the figure of Delane, its great chief, as a kind of supreme head among the journalists of the day! And there were statesmen, too; how thoroughly people

believed in their Palmerston! Cobden was alive, extremely wise, fair-spoken, and persuading; and Disraeli was coming to the front, and rather held back than urged forward by the once fiery Lord Derby; and Gladstone was bringing forward his magnificent Budgets, that seemed to brim over with the results of wealth and prosperity.

Where was anarchy then? Where lurked the forces that threaten the disruption of society? Even if we were revolutionists and conspirators in a way—was it not all for something that was to remodel and improve, and not to destroy the world? Charming theories we had—’tis thirty years ago—mild, benignant, mixed up with the ardour of youth and the love of beauty—

Oh! ’twas light that ne’er can shine again
On Life’s dull stream!

THE MAJOR’S BLANKETS.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

THERE was no reason why Miss Rachel Godwin should have a lodger. That addition to limited finances had once been very welcome, when she was left to fight the world with only a houseful of old-fashioned furniture—a library, of yet more old-fashioned medical works, and a collection of obsolete surgical instruments, formerly wielded by her deceased father in an ill-paid country practice.

But the times changed. Better fortune seemed to come in when Miss Godwin opened her doors to an orphan niece, although the portionless girl brought with her no gold save that in the sunny hair which framed her winsome face, and grew in a tantalising fringe over the sweetest blue eyes in the world.

First one, then two, then three of those mine ventures, which the sanguine doctor always had diagnosed so hopefully, and in which he had continually invested to reap the usual dividend of disappointment, turned out so many “good things,” and combined to make Miss Godwin, at least, comfortably off. She might have managed without the lodger. Still, as advertisements put it, “The house was too large for her requirements,” and had it been otherwise, its mistress would have suffered much inconvenience ere parting with the middle-aged, half-pay officer, whose love of rod and line had brought him to Stapleton years before, and had kept him ever since the tenant of her first floor.

Major Vincent was Miss Rachel’s ideal.

In her eyes, his short portly frame was the perfection of manly beauty—his curiously bald head the mark of intellect. Her admiration would even dare fish-bones; and when the Major brought home enough roach and dace to choke the household, she would pronounce those insipid victims "delicious." On such occasions, a certain ceremony was observed. The fish were presented with Major Vincent's compliments. Miss Godwin straightway returned an invitation to supper. And then the aunt would watch the niece's face—and watch in vain—for some reflex of her own appreciation of the homage which was laid at the girl's pretty feet.

Miss Rachel never thought of him for herself. Her own life was too mournfully distinguished as a blighted existence. No one ever spoke of a plethoric auctioneer, who had sought refuge in Spain, and was understood to have taken her young heart with him to that defaulter's paradise. It was years ago; but still Miss Godwin's most cherished possession was a huge brooch, which contained some sandy hair. The most furious creditors had forgotten; but Miss Rachel was faithful to his memory. Major Vincent came next in her estimation.

So, after twenty-four hours' absence from home, as she jumped out of the train, and scarcely stayed to greet a fair girl, waiting to meet her, Miss Rachel's first inquiry was for the Major.

"Oh, we have not neglected the precious charge. His 'Serene Highness' is in perfect preservation," Grace answered, with no reverence for the exalted title bestowed by herself, in recognition of her aunt's adulation.

There was a tiny flush on the pretty cheeks, and she went on with a light indifference, almost painful to that loyal lady. "The unkind east wind has made him a trifle hoarse, as might be expected, when an elderly gentleman will sit all day by the riverside in March. His complexion may be a more pronounced yellow—that is curry; and he is certainly rather nervous and fidgety—that is, fretting for your absence."

It was Miss Rachel's turn to colour a little. She always tried a calm unconsciousness when Grace affected to relegate the half-pay Indian officer's affections to her.

"The Major never thinks the house the same in my few absences," Miss Rachel spoke not altogether with regret. "I did not want him to know."

"His sympathetic nature must have felt the absence, and the chilly night so far overcame his innate modesty, as to induce him to write a note to me, in addition to the neatly sealed packet awaiting you. The end of the month—pay day, you know."

"Grace!" Miss Rachel Godwin looked anxiously up and down the road; but the station was left behind them, and no one was about in the keen March wind. "My dear, such very plain—quite coarse—language."

"Alas! I never shall learn refinement," was the mocking answer. "Well, then, it is the day for his 'Serenity's' punctual monthly honorarium. That is a superior expression, almost equal to his well-selected phrases, which demanded an answer."

"An answer! Grace, dear, has he? Do you mean——?"

"I mean that the Major, when not shivering by the waterside, shivers at home."

Miss Godwin's brief gladness, if gladness it were, was dissipated by the quiet interruption:

"The meek request was about his own warmth and comfort—more bed-clothes, in fact."

"You attended, Grace?"

"Can you doubt it? Our esteemed friend only had four blankets, so I directed Martha to put on another pair. His humble petition was for an eider-down quilt; but, of course, my delicacy could not discuss such details, and he was referred to you in a little letter as ceremoniously polite as his own."

"He was satisfied, dear?"

"Yes; meeting him on the stairs he seemed more than satisfied." Grace's face clouded at the reminiscence. "I hope he will not be so satisfied again. His thanks were too effusive; his bow nearly sent him over the banisters—and—and I think he wanted to kiss my hand."

"How I admire that frank, soldier-like gallantry."

The elder lady was enthusiastic; the younger very decisive.

"I don't particularly; my hand is not for him."

"It was an honour, child; an honour from such a brave soldier, such a perfect gentleman."

"I object to honour from brave soldiers; if they were fifty times as perfect, I shall always be true to Mark."

"Grace, please spare me those allusions."

A mere clerk—the drudge of a wine merchant's office, whose father was——”

“Yes; I know, aunt. A bankrupt and all that,” broke in the girl. “Is that Mark's fault?”

“I never said so. The young man is well enough in his own sphere.” They had reached home; but Miss Rachel paused at the door in overwhelming dignity. “Let him so remain. I refuse to sanction Mr. Mark Leslie's alliance.”

“We have nothing half so grand as that. Ours is a simple engagement”—there was a gleam of something akin to defiance in the blue eyes, a heightened colour on the fair cheek—“an engagement to which we shall both be ever true, despite all the world.”

“Grace, I will not—goodness: gracious!” Miss Godwin might well exclaim as she entered her own usually neat and spotless domain. The hall was splashed with more mud than had ever been there before. Little pools of water were shining everywhere, and the prim lady stared aghast.

CHAPTER II.

“GOODNESS gracious!”

It was not altogether a lucid remark, but was repeated by the bewildered lady. Another surprise was coming, and, to meet it with becoming dignity, Miss Godwin sat herself down on the wet chair which an odd-looking young man placed for her, as she inquired with manifest displeasure, “Mr. Leslie, is it you?”

It was not an unnatural question. Mark was anything but a dandy. Still, his clothes were always carefully brushed and well-fitting; his collar immaculate; his auburn hair—Grace would not allow it was red—neatly arranged. Now that last showed bits of grass and river-weed, which same clung round his neck to decorate his shirt-front, whilst the moisture trickled from his boots and marked his track, until, in the half light, that wine merchant's book-keeper might have been a new style of Triton, whose assumed garb of civilization was several sizes too big one way and proportionately scanty the other.

“Is it you?”

There was no doubt, at least, in one person's mind. The girl fearlessly put both her hands in his two muddy ones, and the touch and her bright smile gave him courage to face the mistress of the desecrated establishment.

“Pardon me, Miss Godwin, I will not

affect to be welcome here. Let me assure you that my intrusion is not quite a willing act.”

Miss Rachel acknowledged the speech by a frigid stare; and she noticed that he was wearing an overcoat, which, ample enough to button twice around Mark's rather slight frame, yet barely reached below his waist; also that it, of all his garments, was dry.

“I do not know who can have invited you to enter. I cannot think that Major Vincent——”

“He did,” put in Mark quickly; and there was a flush glowing through the mud-stains on the young man's cheek. “He did, being doubtless unaware that I had been forbidden these doors.”

“And is that gentleman also to be thanked for all this disorder?”

“Exactly; it is mainly his doing. Not but what I may have contributed a little,” which, as Mark was standing in a pool of his own drippings, seemed not altogether improbable. “The fact is, Major Vincent has met with a slight accident.”

Miss Godwin trembled visibly. Remembering his love of angling, those offending, dirty footprints assumed a terrible significance; and imagination saw the unlucky officer fished out from one of his deepest roach-holes—not pale—even alarm could only picture that saffron visage a delicate, primrose tint, as they bore him home, limp and motionless.

“Mr. Leslie! dear Mr. Leslie!” Mark had never been favoured with that adjective before. In her excitement she even took the hand which had been giving Grace's fond fingers a cold bath all this time. “Is he—is he drowned?”

“My good lady, pray be calm. Although Major Vincent certainly did fall into the water, it is all right. He is none the worse, I assure you—certainly not drowned by any means. I chanced to be near the river and was fortunate enough to pull him out. I brought him here, and have just seen him safely to his own room.”

“Where you can hear him for yourself, aunt,” interposed Grace; “apparently very much alive, calling for a warming-pan, all the blankets in the house, and hot brandy.”

“His voice does seem unimpaired.”

Then Miss Godwin added illogically: “It is like his brave spirit to suffer and make no moan.”

“Positively Major Vincent is unhurt.” Mark was very near smiling. “The bank was treacherous, and it landed him in a

lot of soft mud, floundering in which he made a very considerable moan. His frightened struggles might have rolled him into deep water had I not come along."

"And he owes his valuable life to your bravery. Grace, dear, Mr. Leslie saved him."

It was more than superfluous for the aunt to challenge the niece's admiration. The girl never doubted her lover's heroism.

"Of course he did," was the proud rejoinder. "My Mark would save anybody from anything. I hope the Major was grateful."

"Without doubt," Mark Leslie smiled again.

"He thanked me as well as his chattering teeth and the pace we came here would let him. He was even so thoughtful as to insist on my wearing this dry coat of his."

"Whilst we keep you standing about in your wet things. Run away, sir, this very instant," commanded Grace.

"We have been inconsiderate, I fear." Anxiety for her favourite relieved, Miss Rachel could think of his preserver. "Go home at once, Mr. Leslie. Wait one moment though." The mistress of the house disappeared. She did not mind leaving those two young people alone together. She was gone a brief space, to return with a bottle of brandy. "Accept this. Take it—in bed—to oblige me."

"I will not promise that, Miss Godwin," after a moment's hesitation over the gift. "But I will drink your health and happier days to us all, and may no harm result to Major Vincent."

The lady was looking kindly after the wine merchant's clerk, so recently condemned, and now marching away with a bottle of her best brandy bulging out the Major's coat.

"He is a worthy young man. A very worthy young man. Only——"

Miss Rachel had watched Mark out of sight, and then proceeded upstairs, where a prolonged snore came through the lodger's closed door to comfort her, and interrupt the murmured speech. She was thoughtful, almost tender, as she came down to open the Major's missive to herself; and the yet more scrupulously-folded note enclosed with the usual "honorarium."

With customary deliberation they were counted out. But those six golden coins set up such a rattling in her shaking hand,

that the girl looked across to see a startled, almost incredulous wonder in her relative's face.

"Aunt, what is the matter? Is there a bad sovereign? Has he given notice to quit?"

Miss Rachel Godwin's manner was strange, while the answer was an enigma. "I cannot trust myself to speak just now, dear. Major Vincent is the dearest man—as I am the most fortunate woman in all the wide world. Notice to quit, did you say? No, indeed! Death alone shall ever part us."

CHAPTER III.

"MAJOR VINCENT'S very kindest regards, and he is none the worse for his accident, and begs the honour of an interview with Miss Godwin."

It was the answer next morning to her anxious enquiries, and explained his restless tramping overhead for so long.

"His Serenity has been making himself beautiful for ever. Alas! it's not for me. But I'm off."

The aunt had imparted some wondrous information to her niece, and now, as they heard the gentleman to whom it related coming down, Grace, with a mischievous smile, made her escape by the window.

"Be of good cheer, auntie," she cried. As a matter of fact, her relative was in a curious unwonted perturbation. "Be of good cheer. You see, after all, I was right. My benison be on you both."

The Major entered. Like Miss Rachel, as Grace had phrased it yesterday, he was "nervous and fidgety," and when he had, in person, answered her tender enquiries, although there was a chair placed invitingly at the lady's side, he took one at the other end of the room. Apparently he was as interested in the landscape outside, as she was in the pattern of the carpet within.

"My dear madam, you see a humble suppliant—a suppliant very conscious of his own demerits, and who yet aspires to your favour."

Miss Rachel murmured something as he paused for inspiration after getting so far. Her encouraging smile was intended to refute his own disparagement; but his humility insisted on that expression.

"I am conscious of my own demerits! Yet I am so bold—I hoped—that is I am afraid—I mean I ventured—I should say I was afraid to venture to hope——"

Major Vincent halted his verbal squadron. He was floundering in a flood of

words, as overwhelming as the ooze, and mud, and tangled weeds—as much beyond his depth as the river from which Mark Leslie had rescued him the day before.

"You had my note?" he jerked out desperately.

The lady inclined her head, and he went on:

"My youth is over, I care not to deny it," generously self-abnegating. "It is over. But youth, as a rule, is not very comfortably off. The toils and dangers of warfare have taught me to appreciate domestic happiness. You know so much, dear Miss Godwin."

"I know more than that," she responded with flattering warmth. "I know that any woman may be proud of a brave soldier's love."

The lady was fumbling at her neck. The old-fashioned gallantry she admired brought him across the room. It impelled him to raise her hand to his lips; and the pin of a brooch which Miss Rachel had made a palpable parade of unfastening, scratched Major Vincent's nose.

"You are very good," he resumed; "to a quiet old soldier habit is second nature. I could not leave Stapleton, and the fishing, and you. I almost feared to offer so prosaic a lot to one whose young life might well have more glowing dreams."

Miss Rachel was rather mystified, and yet pleased. Some of his speech might be vague, but the latter portion was nice.

"Happiness is not of the gay world," she murmured softly; "more is mine than I dared to hope for."

With an impressive air, still meant to attract attention, the speaker put the before-mentioned brooch solemnly from her. As it lay on the table, the earliest April sunshine—it was peeping out at last—lighted up the sandy hair of that auctioneer who so long ago had taken her heart, her love, her truth, in one lot to Spain. Miss Rachel turned her face away, and buried the memory beneath a convenient newspaper.

"It is well to forget the romance of youth," she whispered. "Let the past go. The future will make amends."

It was the soldier's turn to be mystified. He still held fingers which attempted no withdrawal. He was too ceremonious to let them drop.

"It is like your kind heart to live again in the happiness of others. I knew your goodness would give me the dear girl's hand."

"The—dear—girl's—hand!" Miss Rachel jerked away her own digits, as she vacantly re-echoed the words: "The—dear—girl's—hand!" You mean that you would marry my niece?"

"Surely." Her altered tone warned the Major of impending trouble. "Surely."

"It should be an honour; but it is unfortunately impossible." Miss Godwin's temperature made one great drop from "summer heat" to "freezing." She was by no means sorry to chill and wither the buds of hope. "Quite impossible; the child is engaged already; and"—with emphasis—"to a sincere and estimable young man."

"Pardon me. I fail to understand." The half-pay officer could be immensely stiff when he chose. "My conceit may have misled me; but the young lady, your niece, did refer me to you."

"Stop!" Miss Rachel bravely faced the situation. "It was an unfortunate mistake. You must have made an error in your correspondence. Your note to my niece only related to more"—the speaker's virgin modesty found a fitting word—"to more drapery. That was all. Another hardly comprehensible communication was enclosed to me."

In this awakening from his dreams, as the miserable knowledge dawned upon him, the unlucky Major actually gasped. It was a crushing defeat; but like a skilful general, he prepared to retreat in good order.

"I have been guilty of a prodigious blunder," he groaned. "I was nervous and fidgety"—the girl's words again. "I used the wrong envelopes; and I humbly apologise."

"My dear Major, it is nothing." Uncertain how far she had committed herself, the lady also meant leaving the field with dignity. "Your letter to me brought the usual 'honorarium'; the other part was scarcely read. I deemed it a mere idle pleasantry—a jest for the day—the first of April, you know." The cold smile upon her face was like a gleam of sunshine on an iceberg. Never had her hero seemed less heroic in Miss Rachel's eyes. Yet she had no pity, and cruelly emphasised the date. "Yes, it seemed an April Fool sort of joke," she went on. "Certainly, I was surprised at a gentleman asking my niece for more blank—that is for warmer drapery."

"I would be shot rather than discuss such details with a young lady. It has

been a most absurd mistake," groaned the Major, then he stopped.

The reference to his own ease and warmth evoked another reflection. In sober middle-age, with his fixed and methodical habits, comfort was, at least, an equivalent for love. Miss Godwin—the action was yet more significant—had picked up her brooch. The hands replacing it were plump and white. He remembered those hands had always delighted to minister to him, and again he took possession of them.

"Kindest of ladies, bear with me. May not Fate have been wiser than I was? Suppose my letter had been written for you, what would your answer have been?"

She did not tell him; but her fingers lingered in his, though maidenly reserve sealed Miss Rachel's lips. The Major misunderstood her silence. He led her to the window. A young couple were in the garden outside; and Grace's winsome face showed a new happiness.

"That sweet girl will be leaving some day"—the aunt winced—"and you would be very lonely, dear." He had never so spoken before. It brought back her smile. "Very lonely, dear Miss Rachel."

"Lonely no more, Bartholomew." It was Major Vincent's Christian name. Her lips lingered with a gentle cadence on the polysyllables. "Bartholomew, never lonely with you!"

Despite the bliss of the moment, that officer was troubled by a new reflection. The tale would get abroad, and he thought of a certain fair, but mocking face.

"My dear Miss Rachel, let this be our secret. I would rather, much rather, that Grace did not know."

"The child has her own happiness to think of." In view of that evident anxiety, Miss Rachel was content that Mark should claim his bride. "Her own happiness with the Mr. Leslie who rescued you. He is but a clerk"—with the grandeur befitting a prospective officer's wife—"but a highly respectable young man——"

"I should think so," broke in the Major warmly. "The highly respectable young man saved me from a terrible fate, and I owe him more than thanks. His employers, Rack and Binney, are not bad people, though their sherry is not a really dry wine. But that is not their clerk's fault. I must find a better berth for Mark Leslie—not only for saving my life, but for dear Grace's sake. We will all try to make this a very happy and real First of April."

EMIN PASHA.

SINCE the murder of Gordon, and the death of Livingstone, no figure in all the history of European enterprise in Africa has attracted so much attention as that of the heroic individual now known as Emin Pasha. While we write, two hemispheres are waiting in anxious suspense for news of the rescue of Gordon's devoted successor by the same intrepid traveller who carried aid to Livingstone. Yet even as Livingstone did, so it is probable that Emin will do—refuse to quit the scene of his labours and his triumphs until his work be completed. Meantime the occasion is fitting to consider who and what is the remarkable man now shut up in Central Africa; why he is there; and what he has done during the long period of his isolation. A volume of his letters and journals was recently published in Germany, under the editorship of Professors Schweinfurth and Ratzel, and has just been republished in this country under the supervision of Dr. Felkin of Edinburgh*—himself a well-known African traveller. From this volume we are enabled to gather all that can be told of Emin, until Stanley returns—with or without him.

Emin, then, is the name adopted by Eduard Schnitzer, a native of the small town of Oppeln, in Prussian Silesia. He was born in 1840; and two years later his father, who is described somewhat vaguely as "a merchant," removed with his family to Neisse, in which town the mother and sister of Emin still reside. At Neisse he was educated at the Gymnasium, and in due time went to Breslau University, and later to Berlin, in pursuit of the study of medicine. He graduated at Berlin in 1864, and was very proud at being able to sign himself M.D. But more even than by medicine—in which he took both a philanthropic and a scientific interest—was he attracted by studies in natural history and dominated by a strong desire for travel. Both tastes were so strong, and yet moved so much in harmony, that at the end of 1864 he went to Turkey, to see if a medical practice could not be found or established there. He was fortunate enough to obtain an appointment on the staff of Hakki Pasha, whom he accompanied on a series of official journeys through Armenia, Syria,

* "Emin Pasha in Central Africa," London, George Philip and Son.

and Arabia, and back to Constantinople. Hakki died in that city in 1873, and Eduard Schnitzer in 1875 returned for a time to his friends in Germany. But not for long, for with him, as with all who begin a life of wandering, the restless spirit of Ulysses was ineradicable. In 1876 he was to be found making his way to Egypt, and there he entered the service of the Khedive as Dr. Emin Effendi. He was attached to the Governor-General of the Soudan at Khartoum, and on arriving there, was sent to be chief medical officer in the Equatorial Province, of which Gordon Pasha was at that time Governor.

The reason why Dr. Schnitzer took the name of Emin, was because he thought that his best chance of obtaining an entrance into the Mohammedan world—in which he was to work for an indefinite number of years, and where a traditional distrust exists of Europeans—was to divest himself of all traces of his Frankish origin. His extraordinary mastery of languages made it easier for him than for most men to do this. He was not only accomplished in French, English, and Italian, and in several Slavonic languages, but he had, during his wanderings, obtained a thorough mastery of Turkish and Arabic—"as few Europeans know them," to use his own words. He was studying Persian, and by this time is doubtless at home in most of the dialects of Central Africa.

Thus, then, by changing his name, Schnitzer might pass among the Mohammedans of the Soudan for an Egyptian, and, at any rate, as not one of the hated Franks, and this counted for a great deal in the strange land where he was to labour. The name he adopted—Emin—is an Arabic word signifying "the faithful one," and never was a happier selection made in nomenclature. Assuredly as long as civilisation has any history, and human effort any chronicler, the name of Emin will be remembered and honoured.

It need hardly be said that Gordon took at once to Emin. He regarded him as something a great deal more than a medical officer; sent him on tours of inspection through the province, and on diplomatic missions to various chiefs. Finally, when appointed to the post of Governor-General of the Soudan, Gordon handed over to Emin Effendi the administration of the Equatorial Province, which, broadly, extends from about the ninth to the second parallel, down, in fact, to the northern shores of the Lake Albert Nyanza, with

which all readers of African travel are more or less familiar. Between the southern limits of the province and the Lake Victoria Nyanza, on which are various missionary stations, are the native states of Unyoro and Uganda—two nations who are always more or less at war with each other, and through whose territory it has been impossible for some years for Europeans to penetrate. The famous Mtesa was King of Uganda; but since his death that state has been dominated by his son Mwanga, a youth, by all accounts, of the most approved savage type, and to whom the murder of Bishop Hannington is attributed.

It was in this far-reaching territory that first Sir Samuel Baker and then "Chinese" Gordon had struggled to suppress the iniquitous slave-trade, a struggle in which neither was by any means cordially supported by persons in authority at Khartoum and Cairo. Nevertheless, Gordon had brought it into an organised and a peaceful, although not into a "paying," condition, for it was labouring under a heavy debt, and was leaving an annual large deficit. When Gordon retired he was followed by a succession of corrupt and incompetent native governors, who rapidly reduced the province again to a state of anarchy, and made it the abode of oppression, and robbery, injustice and brutality. The various tribes, who had expanded under the benign influence of Gordon's rule, suffered severely under his infamous successors, while the slave dealers, entrenched in fortified villages, at once recommenced their abominable traffic.

This was the condition of the country when Gordon, having returned to Khartoum as Governor-General of the Soudan, appointed Emin as Governor of the Equatorial Province, his post up to that time having been only Surgeon-in-Chief. Up to this time, too, he had no Egyptian rank, but, in course of time, became successively Bey and Pasha.

Emin assumed the reins in 1878, and within a few years he had effected a great change in the province. He had got rid of a number of the disreputable officials, many of them Egyptian criminals banished and taken into Government employ after undergoing their sentences. He had replaced untrustworthy Egyptian soldiers by natives whom he had trained and could trust. He had rebuilt the stations which had fallen into disrepair; equalised taxation; removed the discontent of the people, and had cleared out

the slave-dealers, who were the curse of the land.

He also superintended a hospital at Lado, then his chief station or capital, and made frequent tours through his territory. By the end of 1882 he was able to report that his province was at peace, and free from slave-traffic; that the cultivation of cotton, of indigo, of coffee, of rice, and of sugar was being industriously prosecuted; that a regular weekly post had been established between the stations; that the roads were being mended, and made more permanent; and that the budget, instead of a deficit, was showing a profit of eight thousand pounds after providing for all the expenses of administration. And all this was achieved, unaided, by a German doctor, who knew nothing of military matters, finance, or agriculture, when he went to Africa, and whose only experience in diplomacy had been gained there under Gordon.

But not the least remarkable thing about Emin is his fondness for scientific work, and the ardour with which he pursues botanical and geological inquiries in spite of, but not to the neglect of, the overwhelming official duties resting upon him. His journals teem with notes of the profoundest interest to the naturalist; and there is also reason to believe that he has solved some geographical problems of importance with regard to the countries and the rivers to the south of the Albert Lake, and in other parts.

It is, indeed, expected that, when he returns, or is once more brought into touch with Europe, he will enable geographers to practically reconstruct the map of Central Africa to the north of the Equator.

Dr. Felkin, who was with Emin in 1878 and 1879, records that what he was most struck with in Emin is his devotion to duty, and the absolute unselfishness of his character. His whole heart, says Felkin, seems to be centred in the welfare of his people and in the advancement of science, without any thought of fame or personal advantage.

Dr. Hartlaub says: "The amount of work that Emin Pasha has performed in making zoological collections, observations, and notes, is astonishing in the highest degree. It could only have been performed by a man whose heart was aglow with the pure fire of scientific interest, with enthusiastic, absolutely unselfish love of Nature, and with an irresistible impulse to add to her knowledge the trea-

asures to the full extent of his powers. Emin was able to turn this impulse into action, notwithstanding the pressure of difficult surrounding circumstances, and the many and varied duties which his high position compelled him to fulfil."

This then is the man who, always treated with coldness by the Egyptian Government, was abandoned to his fate when the Mahdi troubles broke out, when Khartoum fell, and Gordon was slain. For three years and a half Emin was without trustworthy news from the outer world; without any at all from Europe. He learned that Lupton Bey, formerly his Lieutenant, and afterwards Governor of the neighbouring province of Bahr-el-Ghazalhad, surrendered to the Mahdi, and for a time he felt that he would have to do the same.

But he held out; and by-and-by the reverses in the fortunes of the False Prophet confirmed him in his determination to hold his territory until he was relieved.

Towards the end of February, 1886, he received, via Zanzibar, a despatch from Nubar Pasha, informing him that the Soudan was to be given up, that the Government were unable to assist him, and that he might take what measures he thought proper to leave the country. In short he was left to his fate, and it was small consolation to him to learn that he had authority to draw on the English Consul-General at Zanzibar, for what money he might need. Writing about this to Dr. Schweinfurth, he bitterly remarks: "They simply suggest to me the way to Zanzibar, just as they would a walk to Shubra!"

But the way to Zanzibar was not open. Mwanga had succeeded to Mtesa as King of Uganda, and had adopted an attitude of hostility to Europeans. He would not allow Emin to pass through his territory, and intercepted, for a long time, the supplies which Dr. Junker had dispatched to him. And even if he could have got away Emin would not have gone. Writing to Dr. Felkin, in July, 1886, he expresses the belief and hope that England, at any rate, would not leave him there to perish, and would appreciate the importance of supporting him in crushing the slave-trade, and keeping the people of the province free.

In April, 1887, he learned through Mr. Mackay, the imprisoned Missionary in Uganda, that help was being sent to him, and he writes again at that date to Dr. Felkin, expressing his gratitude and thanks. But,

he adds: "If the people of Great Britain think that as soon as Stanley or Thomson comes, I shall return with them, they greatly err. I have passed twelve years of my life here, and would it be right of me to desert my post as soon as the opportunity for escape presented itself? I shall remain with my people until I see perfectly clearly that both their future and the future of my country is safe. The work of Gordon, paid for with his blood, I will strive to carry on, if not with his energy and genius, still according to his intention and in his spirit." And again: "All we would ask England to do, is to bring about a better understanding with Uganda, and to provide us with a free and safe way to the coast. That is all we want. Evacuate our territory? Certainly not!"

What then is the charm of this territory to which Emin is so attached? It is a beautiful country, as we have heard before from Sir Samuel Baker and other travellers; but we gain a better idea of many portions of it from Emin's journals. True, it has its disadvantages, as the following description of a march in the district of Fatiko will show:

"Grass of a height and closeness rare even in Unyore, and dripping with dew, had literally to be broken through, for, as soon as we had left the village, there was no road of any kind. As I had taken the lead, I had, of course, the first and full enjoyment of the grass, thorns, and water, and at a temperature of sixty-three degrees Fahr., to have to crawl, as wet as a drowned rat, through bushes, is unpleasant even in Central Africa. It was scarcely possible to take compass bearings, everything was so wet, and the grass thrust itself so impertinently even into our ears and eyes. The first clearing was reached after about two hours and three quarters' march, and was hailed with joy, for we could dry ourselves there in the sun. The delay—our rate of marching could not have been more than two miles an hour—was made up for by a quick march on a better ground we had now reached, where the men ran to warm themselves, for the cool wind was blowing. At Modo, our old night quarters, which we reached shortly after midday, the water, always scanty enough, had been drunk up by elephants and buffaloes, and so we had to go on with thirst unquenched for two hours and a quarter longer to Ras-el-Fil. There we found water in a row of holes, which tasted good after a march of eight hours."

This extract will serve to illustrate some of the discomforts of travel in the outlying parts of Emin's territory, and is, indeed, typical of what travellers have to expect in African travel. But in the settled parts of his dominions, far other pictures are presented. At the stations, gardening has been promoted, and fruits and vegetables are produced in abundance. Among his many agricultural experiments, Emin has introduced several varieties of bamboo, has encouraged the natives to cultivate several American grains, the seeds of which he had had sent to him, has promoted and extended the cultivation of rice, and many other crops. "The love of gardening and cultivation," he says, "has much increased among my people, and I daily receive letters begging of me seeds and plants." But, from a commercial point of view, the most promising aspects of the country are in the advantage which it offers and the success which has been obtained in the cultivation of cotton, and coffee, and of sugar. Besides these products, Emin wrote to Dr. Schweinfurth in 1883, naming ivory, oil of several kinds, skins, corn (!), ostrich feathers, india-rubber, wax, and iron as products of the country in which a large trade could be done. The deposits of iron are in several places, and the existence of other valuable minerals is more than probable. Caoutchouc, Emin said, he could supply in large quantities, but at the time was prohibited from entering into direct commercial relations with "the world," because he was obliged then to deliver all his produce at Khartoum, and to receive from thence in exchange the very worst goods at the very highest prices.

It is not difficult to see that in a country so richly endowed, and with a people who have now learned the blessings of peace and have been trained for years to habits of systematic industry, there must be a considerable market for many European products. The difficulty is to gain and maintain a line of communication. The Nile route is now closed, and is likely to remain closed for a long time, but in any case it was a long and difficult route. Other possible routes exist from the Zanzibar coast and through Uganda, and from the Congo. The latter is what Stanley has followed, and his experience will have much effect in determining the future course to be adopted in opening up the Equatorial Province.

These are the commercial considerations; but there is also a philanthropic considera-

tion. The slave-trade has been the curse of Africa, and there can be little doubt that it has been winked at, and even shared in, by high Egyptian officials. In spite of them, and in spite of the strength of the Arab traders, Emin has banished the traffic from his dominions, at any rate, and humanity demands that we shall not permit it to be revived, as was done after Gordon left the country. In fact, the only hope of quashing this nefarious trade is in preserving European dominance in the heart of Africa. Missionary effort will certainly not do it unaided; but in this connection it is encouraging to learn from Emin that not more than ten converts to Mohammedanism have been made in his province in twenty years. This is characterised by his German biographer as a crushing fact for the future of Islam in Central Africa. "On no account," says this writer, "must any one imagine that our countryman is a renegade, or that he has given up the faith of his fathers. Emin does not belong to those half-hearted Christians, who talk about the advantages of the Mohammedan religion as a civilising agent in Africa. On the contrary, it may be seen from many of his letters, that he has the heartiest sympathy with the efforts of Christian missionaries." And, let us add, he has nobly prepared the way and smoothed the path for these missionaries.

We should have liked to have shown from Emin's journals something of his wonderful faculty of observation, and his graphic power of description. We should have liked, too, to have cited some of the curious facts he records about the characteristics and habits of the various peoples gathered under his rule, as well as those he visited in outlying native states, for nothing escapes him. But space will not permit, and, indeed, the journals present a perfect embarrassment of riches. The difficulty, indeed, would be to know what to select. But our object in this paper has been rather to show the man and his own personal work, than to present a view of Central African life and geography. When the result of Stanley's expedition is known we may return to the subject again, for, as the old Roman said, "something new is always coming out of Africa."

RATHER MERRY ENGLAND.

WHEN our summer holiday has come to an end and we are being whirled homewards in the closing days of October or in

the beginning of the traditional month of gloom, we are not unlikely to congratulate ourselves that our lines have been cast, for the coming season, amid the glare of the gaslight, the crowd, and hurry, and stress of the streets, rather than in some village, dropped down in one of the reeking valleys or gloomy flats through which we are being carried. Here and there in the distance a solitary light, shining out from some shapeless mass of distant cottages grouped around the stunted tower of the church, reveals to us that men manage to exist in such forlorn solitudes though the days be dull and lonely and no companionship possible without a long tramp through the miry ways. To the true town bird the sense of desolation is deepened, rather than dispersed, by the knowledge that men are living there in those dark grey spots which serve to throw up into yet more dreary relief the cold brown of the sodden fields. The shudder will be all the more sincere if he can call back to memory certain days of his own youth passed in such a place, tied by the leg to the clog of some such surroundings, while his spirit was stretching out towards the keener and fiercer flame of life which burns where men swarm and elbow each other at every turn.

All this comes natural enough as a reflection to a man whose range of experience lies principally within the Bow Bells limit. It is not strange that they should fail to see that the spirit of change has been at work, though perhaps with slower hand, in the country as well as in the town. With many of us, who dwell beneath the canopy of smoke, the materials for valid judgement are wanting; but if any man who has yet in his mind a fairly accurate memory of what the country was five-and-thirty years ago, and is, at the same time, well posted in the minor details of contemporary rural life, will take the trouble to compare things present with things past, he will perceive that the conditions of life in a village are as much changed as those of the town.

Let us begin with the question of recreation. Those who have read Mr. Yates' "Recollections," and are acquainted with the history of Mr. Clive Newcome, will most likely come to the conclusion that the Londoner, in search of fun in these days, will have a harder task before him than his father and uncles had in the time when Paddy Green was consul. His country cousin, on the other hand, is much better off than he was in those days. This

I affirm on account of my own early experiences of my birthplace, experiences which I compare with what I now read in the county paper of how the people in Arcady amuse themselves, both under green leaves and under the mirk and mist of winter.

It is a bare truism to state that the countryman is no longer the isolated creature he was when William the Fourth was King, whether or not he is the happier for the change is another matter. Even through the forties and fifties it was no uncommon thing to meet with the belief that the streets of London were paved with gold. The fact that a man belonged to another parish was enough to stamp him as a stranger, and, therefore, an object of suspicion. And, year in year out, how unbroken the monotony was! The season's difference was well nigh the only difference apparent to those bound to the soil; bound, indeed, by no positive law, but realising to the full how strong were the fetters of dire necessity. There was harvest supper in the autumn, and Martlebury Fair in spring—seasons of plentiful intoxication and assaults more or less violent, and of not infrequent visits to the county gaol. There was, indeed, the village ale-house, which was open all the year round, but habitual resort thither was only for those who had ready cash; and wages were low and bread not over cheap in those days. Only here and there could there be found anyone able to read; but if the whole parish had been scholars it would have been difficult to find suitable mental food. For good or evil, the penny paper had yet to be born. Blank dullness, unmarked save by a drunken bout or so, lay stretched between the first of January and the thirty-first of December.

But now the perusal of my county paper in the dreary winter months fills me with amazement. In the local news I read every week paragraphs by the dozen which bear plain testimony to the fact that the rustics are having a very different time nowadays. Our old friend, the penny reader, is quite in the background. Like the battering-ram, and the stage-coach, he has served his purpose, and must now stand aside in favour of those new births of the age, the amateur reciter and actor, the parson with his magic lantern, the local band with their horns and fiddles, and the local Christys.

As my eye lights on an account of a musical entertainment, lately given at West Bockham, I reflect how completely West Bockham must have changed from what I

remember it, to be in a position to furnish a performer capable of entertaining, or an audience susceptible of being amused. A drearier village it would be hard to picture, bare of all legendary rural charm. There was no resident clergyman, the living being held with an adjoining and more attractive parish; neither was there a school nor a resident farmer of any consideration; but there were several public-houses; and, if report did not lie, several families with whom theft and poaching were hereditary callings. Now there must be a school, for that was where the entertainment took place; and the destination of the proceeds, which were to be divided between the organ fund and the parish library, shows that West Bockham has not been standing still while the rest of the world has been forging ahead.

However, the character of the vocal and instrumental pieces of the programme prove that due reverence is still paid to antiquity. The overture to the "Caliph of Bagdad" was "brilliantly rendered" on the piano by the Rector's lady and Miss Rudd. "My Pretty Page" was sung with "charming taste and feeling" by Miss Wilkins and Miss Tompkins. "The Village Blacksmith," and "The Chough and Crow," had also their places in the programme. It comes somewhat as a shock, an uncanny lapse into contemporary art, when one reads that Mr. Fred Rowdy boy provoked shouts of laughter and a double encore by his humorous interpretation of "Two Lovely Black Eyes." The great surprise, however, is left for the last. "The House that Jack Built, in character." The maiden all forlorn, the man all tattered and torn, were represented by a lady and gentleman whose names were strange to me; but when I came to read that "roars of laughter" greeted the impersonation of the "priest all shaven and shorn" by the popular Rector, the Reverend Adolphus Redman, I was more than amazed.

Dolly Redman, who used to nod condescendingly to me when we were up at Oxford, one of the leading spirits of the Bullingdon, whose slim form I have often seen in pink outside Canterbury Gate on mornings when the old Berkshire or the Heythrop were within reach. What would Dolly have said, I wonder, in those days if we should have foreshadowed his destiny, and exhibited him as an antic posturing for the delectation of a lot of ploughboys.

Well, Dolly carried away from the House

just enough of the humanities to give him his degree; and, what use these may have been to him in his after career, it will not profit us to inquire; but if in the hunting field he picked up enough knowledge of men, to teach him to bend his back when there was work to be done, shall we not hope that his tutor dealt lightly with him in the matter of irregularity at lectures; and harbour a suspicion that, after all, Dolly got something in return for that rather stiff cheque which he handed to Tollit at the end of his time? Cynics, if they will, may speculate whether as much could be said on behalf of the tuition fees which he paid to hear the Rev. Mudley Dormer lecture on the "Ethics of Aristotle." Dolly, I remember, was a capital cricketer; and I have no doubt he is now as efficient, as a civilising factor in the cricket field during the summer, as he is on the platform in the winter.

Next I read of the doings of the Wood Walton Amateur Dramatic Society. Wood Walton! I knew it once as well as I know the Strand now, and I would wager that not half-a-dozen of its inhabitants could have guessed what a theatre was like: now Wood Walton is acting the laughable farce of Diamond cut Diamond. Mr. Heartly—guardian to Charlotte—was admirably personated by Mr. Tipple. I did not remember Mr. Tipple; but when I read that Mr. James Straker, as Captain Seymour, fairly brought down the house, I seemed to know where I was. The name of Straker was familiar enough to me. In my youth did not Mrs. Straker keep one of those wonderful village shops? I wonder whether the stores have made an end of them all. When I used to cross Mrs. Straker's threshold in search of brandy-balls, or some boot-laces, or a packet of nails, or a ball of string, or half a Dutch cheese, what a marvellous perfume assailed my nostrils, a perfume made up of all the above, and many other superadded odours. There was, I remember, always a dirty-faced little boy, Jimmy by name, tumbling about the shop; and, more often than not, sprawling over the counter as his mother served me. Is it possible that he can have grown up to figure as "Captain Seymour (in love with Charlotte)"? Is it possible that the change which has come over myself, since I bought and enjoyed Mrs. Straker's brandy-balls and Dutch cheeses, is as great as that which has transformed the squalid urchin of the village shop into the dramatic exponent of the elegant

Captain Seymour? Charlotte herself was personated by Miss Jane Grymer. Heavens, what is the world coming to! Grymer père, in my time, was a working cobbler, a Radical, as all cobblers are, in temporal, and a born Nonconformist in spiritual affairs. I believe his zeal would have led him (after dusk) to break the windows of any building in which such carnal soul-destroying wickedness as play-acting was being perpetrated, and now his own flesh and blood are aiding and abetting therein! I remember, too, that there used to be two pretty little children playing about the cobbler's stall; a girl and a boy. The first no doubt is the "jeune première" of the Wood Walton stage, and I have no doubt but that the latter felt a glow of pride as he read that the scenery painted by Mr. R. Grymer was universally admired. The more serious gatherings have nowadays their livelier side. A blue ribbon meeting is not complete without an element of vocal and instrumental music, and on these occasions the American organ generally comes out strong. It is certainly a wonderful engine of hilarious devotion; but its effect is distinctly unsecular. The performer may safely make trial on its keys of frivolities, which would be flat blasphemy on the piano. As Mr. Corney Grain says, "I have often felt a better man for listening to its lusty trumpeting."

Another consideration forces itself upon me as I read the record of these most decorous high jinks, and this is the evidence I gather from the names of the entertainers, that the social levels, even in sleepy places like Wood Walton and West Bockham, shift and intermix with the lapse of time. As I study my local paragraphs, the movement of the social unit seems to be universally upward; but here, as in a boiling cauldron, if some streams rise, others must descend, and the downward motion of the more luckless ones is not chronicled by the local contributor. Now and then I read of some ne'er-do-well, bearing a name once respected, who has been fined for drunkenness or assault, but as a rule the fall is unnoticed. To revert to the rise; the parents of the young ladies who rattle off pianoforte duets, and "give with charming grace and feeling," "The Miller and the Maid," and other such ditties, and of the youngsters who sing music-hall songs and take light comic parts, were simply peasants, and nothing else. How it is that the young people differ so widely from their progenitors, and whether the

world gains the more pronounced the difference becomes, are questions which the sociologist must take in hand.

RED TOWERS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Gerald," "Alexia," etc., etc.

PART I.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HÔTEL DES DEUX FRÈRES.

THERE is a corner of Paris which few English know, except those who have lived there long, or by some other means know the best of it. This corner is quiet, and yet actually the height of fashion, being in the same quarter as the hotels of the greatest old families. These families, Catholic, Legitimist, and many of them immensely rich, are and must be at the head of France socially, though of course politically they have no power. And their social power they treat with so much indifference, that they are being deprived of it in great measure by the Jews, whose influence predominates in Paris now. But a few years ago these people were more consistent, and those great hotels of the Faubourg, with their high white gates and endless rows of shutters, were inhabited by some of the most really noble men and women in Europe. The mad rush after pleasure, the worship of money, were not quite what they are now; aristocrats, with many faults, to be sure, seemed better to deserve their name.

The Rue Sainte Monique was a short and quiet street, leading from a street chiefly made up of these great houses, with a few dignified shops here and there, to a boulevard opening on some old public gardens with large trees and fountains, certainly the quietest, perhaps in summer the most beautiful of the gardens of Paris. The Jardin Sainte Monique had once belonged to a large convent, which had given its name to the street and neighbourhood, the convent itself still existed, very much reduced, hidden behind towering walls at the garden end of the street. It was rich, and at that time not persecuted, and a favourite school for the young girls of the Faubourg. Next door to the convent, at the end of its long garden wall, was a very pretty house, the Hôtel Sainte Monique, belonging to the convent, but lived in for years by the Vicomtesse de Ferrand. This house also had a garden, and one

more private house brought the little street to an end. A very large and handsome house, belonging to an old family, with its stables and gardens, had originally filled up the other side of the street. But about forty years ago, the owner having ruined himself, the house was sold. The convent tried to buy it, but did not bid high enough, and it fell into the hands of two brothers, who had made their fortune as the chief barbers of the Faubourg. They turned it into an hotel in the modern sense of the word; and ever since the Hôtel des Deux Frères, as they called it, in the quiet little Rue Sainte Monique, had kept up its character as the best hotel in Paris for French people. Many people who had no house or apartment of their own in Paris lived there for the season. It was conveniently near their friends, and not far from anything; it was not dear, and it was supremely comfortable.

The present proprietor was a middle-aged man, son of one of the founders. He kept up the traditions of his family by being a Royalist and a good Christian. No Atheism or Republicanism was to be met with in the Hôtel des Deux Frères, even among the servants, at least with the knowledge of M. Dupont or his excellent wife.

M. Dupont did not advertise his hotel, and it was by the merest chance that any casual travellers found their way there. He did not want them; he was well off already, and preferred knowing who his customers were, and answering for their respectability. No snobs, no "parvenus," if possible, at the Hôtel des Deux Frères. He did not care much for foreign nobility, who were very often too ill-conducted for him; but luckily they found his establishment too quiet to suit their taste. He had a few English customers of old standing, dignified people, yet cosmopolitan, connected with embassies, equally well known in English and French society; related, perhaps, to families in the Faubourg. And a few Englishwomen less great in position had by some means found out the good qualities of M. Dupont's hotel, and were always kindly welcomed by him. He, like his father and uncle before him, had a keen eye for the sort of person who would do him credit; for other people, with all the politeness in the world, the hotel was full to overflowing. Mrs. Percival had been there in her young days with her mother, and her poor sister, Mrs. Darrell; since then she

had gone there rather often, with or without the Canon, whenever it was absolutely necessary to do a little shopping in Paris.

This year, the beginning of December found Mrs. Percival at the Hôtel des Deux Frères, with Paul and Celia. She was deeply engaged with milliners and dress-makers, and to these she gave all her time and thoughts. Celia, to Paul's happiness, did not think it necessary to show an equal devotion. She was obliged, of course, to give up a certain amount of time, and in that time she took a real and rather impatient interest in the plans and doings of her "couturière"; but stuffs, draperies, trimmings, once out of sight, seemed to be out of mind with her, and so completely that her aunt was sometimes a little bit provoked with her indifference. What was the use of bringing Celia to Paris for shopping, if she pretended to think the shops a bore, these charming shops, which in this winter season were more brilliantly distracting than ever? There would be plenty of time in the future for walking and driving about with Paul. It was rather too absurd, for instance, that some silly plan for hearing music in a distant church should hinder Celia from making an appointment with Madame Fripon. After all, however, Mrs. Percival was not seriously angry. She was too thoroughly well occupied and amused for that. She loved shopping; she could shop from morning till night without any weariness, and with the fullest confidence in her own taste. She was also very much pleased with herself for the generous way in which she was behaving to Celia; and Colonel Ward's secret, which she kept religiously, was an unfailing source of serene satisfaction. Besides, she was truly glad that Paul should be happy, even if Celia did neglect immediate duties for him. It was a new development in Celia, this kind of revolt against things practical. A little inconvenient, certainly, coming at this moment; and perhaps, for the sake of the shopping, it would have been better if Paul had stayed in England. But, after all, it did not matter much.

Mrs. Percival was quite artificial enough to agree with the French writer who talks so enthusiastically of Paris in winter. "Pour le voir beau, heureux, opulent, ce Paris du diable, il faut le regarder vivre sous un ciel bas, alourdi de neige. La nature est pour ainsi dire absente du tableau. Ni vent, ni soleil. Juste assez

de lumière pour que les couleurs les plus effacées, les moindres reflets prennent une valeur admirable, depuis les tons gris roux des monuments, jusqu'aux perles de jais qui constellent une toilette de femme."

This was exactly Paris in the first days of that December, when the marriage arranged between Paul Romaine and Celia Darrell was not much more than a month away. "Paris du diable!" Nobody could have suggested that the doings of Mrs. Percival and her young people were diabolic, except so far as all unreality belongs to the devil's kingdom; and the unreality, in this case, belonged to Celia alone. She was not happy, but she was in curiously high spirits, carried away by the strange excitement of that dim yet brilliant city, without wind or sun. It was easy to hurry through the days here, without the solemn influences of nature to bring one to one's self, the varying clouds, the sunsets, the moaning pine-woods about Red Towers. Here the days and nights flew by like scenes in a play, and Celia hardly knew how they were flying. A sort of fatalism seemed to have taken possession of her, in which her only conscious wish was to hurry on the time, to have her marriage over, and everything made certain. But these feelings did not appear to her friends, who only saw that she was looking brilliant, her eyes deep blue, a ready laugh always on her lips. She had never in her life been so charming to Paul, who felt himself quite repaid now for any little coldness earlier in the autumn. It was almost embarrassing, though the delight of it was beyond words, to find himself suddenly necessary to Celia, so that she would go nowhere and do nothing without him. His silent devotion was almost overwhelmed by the sudden difficulty of finding words. The sunshine in which he now lived, under that low grey sky of Paris, was enough to burn out of his memory all past doubts, all need of trust and patience in the days gone by.

One afternoon, just as twilight was beginning to close in on a dismal day of fog and rain, Mrs. Percival and her maid drove into the courtyard of the hotel, on their return from a long day's shopping. The hotel was already lighted up, and looked delightfully gay and comfortable; somebody was playing wild waltz music in the salon, and the waiter said that Monsieur and Mademoiselle had come in some time ago. There was a telegram waiting for

Monsieur in the bureau, he went on to say, and after he got it, he and Mademoiselle went into the salon for a few minutes; then Mademoiselle went upstairs alone. As far as the waiter knew, Madame would find Monsieur still in the salon.

Mrs. Percival looked into the salon accordingly, but saw nothing of Paul. The waltz seemed to grow madder every moment; it was played by a little man with a pale face and flying hair. A few people were scattered about the room, talking and listening: one young man was trying to persuade a girl to dance with him; it was indeed almost impossible to keep still, in that whirl of sound. Mrs. Percival had not listened with any extraordinary interest to what the waiter told her. Paul often had telegrams—from his agent, or from the upholsterer who was doing the house. Mrs. Percival climbed slowly upstairs—M. Dupont was old-fashioned and disliked lifts—till she came to Celia's door, where she knocked and went in. At first the lights and shadows in the room flickered so that she hardly saw Celia. A small wood-fire was flaming fitfully on the hearth; beyond it, close to the window, Celia was sitting in a red velvet arm-chair. A gilt clock was ticking on the mantel-piece; the floor, in deference to English ideas, was covered with red and yellow carpet. Celia's purchases, clothes, luggage, were thrown about indiscriminately. She sat there with writing things in her lap; as her aunt came in, she shut her blotting-case, and put down her pen and ink on a chair.

"Aunt Flo, what an age you have been!" she said. "Do leave the door a little open; that jolly valse makes one want to dance one's life away."

But Mrs. Percival shut the door in spite of this.

"If you feel like that, you had better go down in the salon," she said. "I am tired, and it distracts my head."

"Sit down, then, and tell me all about everything," said Celia.

She did not move from her own chair, but sat with her face turned to the window, looking out into the deepening twilight, watching the opposite house. Mrs. Percival took off her furs, warmed her feet, and gave a vivid account of her day's doings, to which it seemed that Celia was listening intently enough, for she asked a shrewd question or made a quick remark now and then.

"And what have you been doing all

the afternoon, may I ask?" said Mrs. Percival at last, remembering to be a little injured. "It is all very fine, my poking about everywhere with Timms, and ordering all these things, which are your business after all, while you do nothing but play about, and amuse yourself."

"Now don't grumble," said Celia coolly, "because you know you love and adore shopping, and I should only be in your way."

"No. Paul might be, but not you. I don't say much, because of Paul. I am doing all this for his sake, not for yours, because I like to see the poor boy so perfectly happy."

"Very well; very nice of you," said Celia, but her voice was a little discontented. "I rather wished I was with you this afternoon," she went on—"I have been sitting at this window for the last hour, certainly, with nothing to amuse me but Madame de Ferrand and her friends. I wonder if she knows what a watch M. Dupont's people can keep upon her from this window. I can see all over her garden, as there are no leaves, and into her courtyard, and I can even see her going up her pretty old stairs, and along the gallery, and looking out of the windows. She looks very old, but she walks so nicely, a graceful little old thing. The little girl who is with her must be her grandchild, I think: about eleven, perhaps—but I don't know, she may be older, only she jumps and dances about like a small child, and wears a large pinafore. And to-day there has been another arrival. Such a handsome man!"

"What very good eyes you have!" said Mrs. Percival, laughing.

"Oh yes, of course. I saw him drive up, and then there was such a bustle, and the old lady came tripping out on the steps, and the little girl raced across the court and jumped straight into his arms. Then they both tore across to the old Madame, and he first kissed her hand, as if she was a little old Queen, and she kissed him on both cheeks, and they all screamed and talked at once, and the child danced a war-dance round them. He was certainly the best-looking Frenchman I have seen; fair, and very tall, and a good figure."

"Very amusing," said Mrs. Percival. "And where is Paul, all this time?"

"I don't know. You didn't meet him? He talked of going to look for you, but it seemed rather hopeless, for nobody had a very clear notion where you were gone."

"To look for me! How absurd! I have seen nothing of him, of course. By-the-by, Jules told me he had had a telegram. I hope it was nothing tiresome."

"Oh, tiresome, yes—a horrid bother," said Celia, still looking out of the window. "At least, he is making it so. I think he is behaving rather stupidly. I am a little bit angry with him, to tell you the truth."

"Really! Why? What was it?"

"He is going off to-night. I don't want him to go. I really can't see the necessity for making such a dreadful fuss: we shall not be here many days longer, and, if he were actually wanted, of course they would have asked him to come. As to his duty, I think his duty is to stay with me, if I want him, and I do. He had better not go: I have told him I won't answer for what may happen. The next thing will be that—that everything will be put off, and then I don't quite know— However, if Paul cares for me as much as he pretends, he will do what I wish. I have told him, Aunt Flo, and you may tell him the same."

"Tell him what? What are you talking about? Going to-night! Why, what has happened?" cried Mrs. Percival.

She sat still in her chair, thunderstruck. This conclusion to all Celia's objectless chatter about her opposite neighbours was so strange, so utterly unexpected, that she could hardly believe her ears. She waited for half a minute, frowning and amazed; then she started up, crying out, "Explain, Celia. How can I possibly know what you mean?" and came quickly across to the window where her niece was sitting motionless.

"Well, Aunt Flo, I know you will think me very heartless and very horrid," said Celia; and she slowly turned her pretty head, as it lay against the back of her chair, so that she could look Mrs. Percival straight in the face. "The telegram was from some doctor," she said. "Paul knows him; I don't. It was about Colonel Ward. 'Colonel Ward is ill. How long will you be away?' That was the whole of it. Now why couldn't Paul telegraph that he would be back in ten days, like a reasonable being? There was not a word about danger. Instead of that, almost without listening to me, he telegraphs, 'Shall be at Holm to-morrow.'"

"I don't see how Paul could possibly do anything else," said Mrs. Percival. "You forget, Paul is like a son to the Colonel. He wants to see him, no doubt; and it is just like his unselfishness, dear old man, not to

ask him to come back at once. I am not sure that we ought not all to go. I must ask Paul what he thinks."

"Oh no, no!" said Celia, with a sudden flush. "If we go, we shall never come back, and everything will go wrong, and everything will be put off. What good could we do? If Paul must go, let him go for two or three days, and come back to me here. The Colonel can't be very ill; impossible. Paul confesses that he has always been as strong as a horse. It is some nonsense of that stupid, officious, meddling doctor."

"Well, anyhow, Paul is right," said Mrs. Percival. "And Celia, some day you will agree with me. Yes, he is right to go for worldly reasons, as well as for others."

"Paul never thought of anything of that kind," said Celia. "It is only his obstinate affection for that tiresome old man; and after all, he must have made his will ages ago. Really, the future sometimes makes me tremble—that dear Colonel living at our gates, and criticising everything we do."

Mrs. Percival looked at Celia with a curious expression.

"Don't say any more," she said. "You may be sorry some day. I must confess that I should be very angry with you now, if I were not rather glad to find that you are in love with Paul."

Celia stared. Her aunt said no more, but went away and left her.

"In love with Paul!" the girl repeated to herself; and then she began to laugh. She took a letter out of her pocket and looked at it, a worn letter, crumpled and frayed at the edges.

"What a bore it is!" she said. "I suppose I am rather unhappy; certainly I am a donkey. For even if I could change things now, I don't believe I would. But I'm not in love with Paul, dear Aunt Flo, only it is too stupid of him to go away now, because I don't mind his being in love with me. Perhaps I don't care much for anything or anybody—except having everything I want, and—this horrid letter. What's the use of keeping it, by-the-by! It's dangerous—and I know it well enough to answer it, if I haven't done that already. Oh, Vincent, I wish you had let me alone!"

Then she took a written sheet of paper from her blotting-case, and read it through with smiling mouth and eyes.

"Too silly to send, I'm afraid, but I'll keep it a day or two. Is that the bell at Sainte Monique? I wonder if the nuns

would sing me into a good temper. I hate this—and I must make up with that silly boy, and let him go to his boring old Colonel in peace."

She got up and pulled the window open. It had stopped raining, and was not yet dark. In the opposite house she could see the little dark figure of Madame de Ferrand, stepping along through her glazed gallery, followed by her maid with a large cloak. No doubt she was going to Benediction at Sainte Monique. The convent church was a favourite resort of all the ladies, great and small, in the neighbourhood, and the fame of the nuns' singing was spread all through Christian Paris.

"Yes; I'll go too," Celia decided. "I wonder if I could anyhow make acquaintance with those people. They would distract me a little while Paul is away."

She put on her prettiest hat, and wrapped herself in furs. Before starting, full of a new idea of being good, she stooped over the fire and dropped Vincent's letter into it, between two little red logs. It flamed up instantly.

"I wish I needn't give you any answer but that, my friend," she murmured, and then she hurried away downstairs. On the way she met her aunt's maid, looking tired and sulky.

"Oh, Timms," she said; "you may as well tell my aunt that I have gone to church. Just across the street, Sainte Monique, the convent church, you know."

"Not alone, miss, at this time of day!" Timms remonstrated.

"Yes, alone. Tell Mr. Romaine he may come and fetch me, if he likes."

As Celia's luck would have it, just as she came out of the hotel, a small door opened in Madame de Ferrand's "porte-cochère" opposite, and she herself stepped into the street, followed by the tall man and the little girl. Celia crossed the street, and followed them closely along the pavement to the tall iron gates of the convent, which were standing a little open. A porter was in charge, and a carriage had just set down some ladies, who were walking up the flagged path, under the shelter of high walls and leafless trees, to the lighted church door. The bell was still ringing, and music and sweet odours came pouring out into the dreary evening.

The gentleman who had walked those few yards with Madame de Ferrand stopped at the gates, and lingered there a moment,

lifting his hat as the old lady and the child passed on. The light of the lamps at the gate fell full upon his handsome face, and on Celia's, too, as she went by, following the others.

Of course he looked at her, holding his hat a moment longer while she passed him; and Celia was quite aware that his glance was one of startled admiration; she was used to much broader stares, by this time, from Parisians of every degree. But she hurried on to the church door, and he walked leisurely back to the Hôtel Sainte Monique.

At the door, having quickened her steps a little, she overtook the old Vicomtesse and the young girl, who raised a lovely little dark face as the Englishwoman came up to her. Celia could not help smiling, as she met those speaking eyes, and her smile added enchantment to her beauty, more brilliant than usual after the excitement she had gone through. The French child, with one quick glance at her grandmother's still graceful back, dipped her finger in the holy water and held it out to Celia, who touched it and then crossed herself, knowing the pretty friendly custom. Then they smiled at each other again; and then the nuns in their grated chapel broke into strange magic singing, with a sweetness intensely sad:

Lingering and wandering on, as loth to die.

Thus in truth it was that Celia approached her first acquaintance with the old Vicomtesse de Ferrand, her granddaughter Antoinette, her son-in-law the Marquis de Montmirail.

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